

Benchmarks

Volume 1 - Number 3 * June 1998

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Feature Articles

[Campus Computing News](#)

Dr. Maurice Leatherbury, Senior Director of Academic Computing Services, continues to provide updates on campus computing. This month he talks about the Computing Center/Telecommunications merger, what Yahoo! thinks about UNT, Web-based course management, and more.

[Research and Statistical Support Update](#)

Research and Statistical Support (RSS) has recently extended their support coverage to several new desktop statistical applications. This article will tell you all about the new software and services available from RSS.

[Name That Tune . . . ummm . . . Computer](#)

If you are running Simeon for the first time on a computer connected to the campus network or have a new computer in your office that isn't working right, it may be time to give your computer a name.

[Keeping Up With Campus Computing News](#)

You can keep abreast of all the computing news on campus if you consult the resources mentioned in this article on a regular basis.

[Just for Fun: Haiku Error](#)

[Messages](#)

Tired of the usual error messages? Try these on for size.

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Network Connection

By [Dr. Philip Baczewski](#), Associate Director of Academic Computing

Those Annoying Web Pages

I'm all for the World Wide Web. I have to admit to being nostalgic for Gopher now and then, but the World Wide Web has made the Internet what it is today (those of you who are new to the Internet may want to find an encyclopedic dictionary of the Internet to learn what the heck an Internet Gopher was). As great as Web pages are, I just can't get around the fact that some are downright annoying. I work to promote the idea of the Internet as a useful tool, and I'm far from turning into an Internet curmudgeon, but lately I've seen several trends in Web page design and implementation that have turned into pet peeves. Maybe it's the heat; maybe some of my son's two-year old impatience is rubbing off on me (I have no idea where he gets that from); maybe the fact that I've been using the Internet since before it was the Internet has long dulled any gee-whiz factor. The fact remains: some Web pages are annoying.

What follows are some annoying Web page traits. These come with real examples to try at home (where slow really is slow). I don't mean to pick on any of the pages featured; many are produced by fine people at excellent organizations. They just happen to be the most recent examples I've found that illustrate my point. Since it has been statistically proven that 99.8 percent of people who use a computer will author a Web page at some time in their life, this information is presented as a public service so that you too do not annoy innocent people on the Internet. Gee, I'm starting to feel better already (it really must be the heat).

Everything's a Graphic

For those who have forgotten: HTML stands for HyperTEXT markup Language. Text is that combination of funny symbols that are strung together to represent human languages, similar to what you are interpreting right now. Text has an amazing ability to communicate information in a very efficient manner. Some might say that text -- in other words, written language -- is the foundation of advanced intellect and knowledge. Text is compact, easily represented by computers, and very quickly transmitted over the Internet. So, why do we have to be subjected to Web pages where everything on it is a picture?

[Www.mcp.com](#) is a good example. This is the Macmillan publishing group's home page. Now, as my [resume](#) can attest, I've had the opportunity to work with some fine folks at Macmillan, but a recent visit to their home page was an exercise in World Wide Wait. First, paint the background brown, then draw the background graphic, then load various bookish graphic images, then load button graphics that, by the way, have text on them. What was to be a brief check for information, turned into a grueling test of Internet bandwidth (the thing that determines how "fast" your Internet connection is). Admittedly they do some fancy Java script to have highlighted menus which pop up a short description of the linked destination, but in some ways that makes matters worse, since it slows down the process even more.

Some pictures might be worth a thousand words, but a picture that says "Info" is still worth one word. Web pages which feature the skillful combination of text and pictures will load fast and provide you with quick and efficient access to the information you seek. That's what this Internet thing is all about: access to information. Please don't dazzle me with your

artistry (pages actually intended as art, excepted). Please don't force me to comply with your visual style. I just want the information.

Perhaps I've got a bit of philosophic undercurrent running here as well. It seems that we've spent at least several thousand years developing written language to the point it is today. The invention of the printing press ultimately lead to new methods of learning, since knowledge no longer needed to be primarily stored and transmitted as oral tradition. It may be that we are experiencing a similar change, with the expansion of electronic information. Will that change be a step forward or backward? If we rely on pictures as the primary way to convey information, are we really making intelligent use of electronic information? (This is your cue to say, "Hmmm.")

Where can we fit that Kitchen sink?

The World Wide Web has been transformed from a hypertext tool with support for some graphic images to a multimedia experience. Web pages can now have movies, sound clips, presentation graphics, virtual reality photos, three-dimensional animations, fancy interactive menus, just to name a few, and the list goes on. Just because these things are possible, doesn't mean you have to use them all on one Web page.

I think that because I use a Macintosh which has particularly good support for sound and music, I tend to feel ambushed by Web pages with extensive sound offerings. Recently, I was looking for a Mattel® toys home page, and got the bright idea that the [Barbie® home page](#) might have a link back to the home company (it doesn't - I've found that Mattel doesn't actually have a corporate home page which is annoying by itself). Yes, there actually is a [www.barbie.com](#). It might thrill a nine-year-old to hear Barbie greet her/him, but by the time you wait for Java to load (a Netscape annoyance) and for the sound clip download, the child could be Eighteen. This is also another one of those graphics-only pages, complete with flashing stars. It's not the worst example of such an annoyance; it's just amplified by the fact it is the Barbie® Web page.

The Stealth Window

Every once in a while you are browsing away and you click on a link. You then try the back arrow, but it doesn't do anything. You check your page history in the "Go" menu and your previously visited sites aren't there. You might or might not realize that the last link you selected opened a new browser window the same size and in the same location as the window in which you were previously browsing. I call this a stealth window. It sneaks up on you just long enough to be confusing.

The site I use to illustrate this is a well-meaning, but a bit overdone church Web site ([www.gate.net/~strose1/strose.htm](#)). This page also fits into the Kitchen Sink category above. The main page offers you a clever, but useless menu that pulls down and makes cute noises while it does so. Selecting the parish home page opens a stealth window that also ambushes you with a rendition of *Amazing Grace* that will play if you have a RealAudio plugin or Apple's QuickTime plugin (more common on a Macintosh than on Windows). Once it starts playing, the only way to stop it (at least in the Macintosh version of Netscape Communicator) is to close that window.

Some vendors will pop up a small extra browser window to highlight a particular item in their catalog. This idea, like a lot of other things, is fine if it is not overdone. If every Web page I visit starts to pop up extra windows, then closing those will be a definite annoyance, and I'm much less likely to bookmark that page.

Other Annoyances

A few other annoyances are encountered while browsing the Web. These are perhaps lesser sins than those listed above, since they don't impinge on your browsing efficiency quite as much.

The Search to Oblivion - Every once in a while you'll search a site, and then ask yourself, how in the heck did they come up with those pages based upon my search words? Implementing Web searching is no trivial matter, but I've noticed that searches are much more effective when they can be done within a category structure (a la [Yahoo](#)'s subcategories). Within a large site, a keyword search without such refinement will turn up some results, but what you are looking for may actually be a long way down the list.

The Zero Content Factor - Have you ever hit a Web page that told you nothing? Usually, when you find a Web page you know something about the page's owner, whether that be a company or individual. What you want is contact information or product information. Some Web pages seem to be out there just so that somebody can say that yes, they have a Web page.

The Useless Introduction Page - Have you ever seen one of these: "Click here to enter the so-and-so Web Page"? If I am already there, why do I have to click again? I have to admit that one of those guilty of this is an institution I am fond of, the [Texas Rangers](#) Baseball team. I've also seen this done on personal pages as a way to provide some humorous or philosophical message. (Don't waste people's time.)

Domain to Nowhere - I like to guess domain names. It's a fast way to find a company's Web page. After all, if you want the "blah" company, the first logical choice is [www.blah.com](#). It seems, however, that are some out there with an overabundance of entrepreneurial spirit, are registering company names and then offering to sell them to the highest bidder. I've seen this described as "virtual real estate" which in itself is an oxymoron. I know that as a company, I'd be quite annoyed if someone were using my name in this way, and as an individual I am quite annoyed when instead of getting a simple "not found" I end up at a page which turns out to be that of one of these virtual hucksters.

End the Annoyance

I wish that Web page authors would remember that what seems quite fast on their development machine may turn into a marathon when it's transmitted across a country and ultimately through a (barely) 28.8kbpi modem connection. For commercial Web pages in particular, I would think the goal is make sure your page gets visited again. This means that you must have useful and efficient access to information. Fancy multimedia menus may be cool, but you still have to balance the "gee whiz" factor with the annoyance factor. As I said, my "gee whiz" sense has long since been dulled, so maybe I'm a bit inclined toward the annoyance factor. I've noticed, however, that "gee whiz" wears out soon, even for those new to the Internet. n

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Each month we highlight one Internet, USENET Special Interest Group (SIG), or similar mailing list.

EDSTAT-L@JSE.STAT.NCSU.EDU

The discussion forum for *Statistics Education* is available by E-mail subscription or as a Usenet News [newsgroup](#) (sci.stat.edu).

To subscribe or change the default settings of your subscription, send your E-mail message containing the listserver command to the address:

listserv@jse.stat.ncsu.edu

To subscribe to the list, in the body of the message, type: **subscribe edstat-l**
yourfirstname yourlastname

To unsubscribe from the list, in the body of the message, type: **unsubscribe edstat-l**

To get more information about the listserver software, in the body of the message, type: **help**

For help with this list contact tbyron@eos.ncsu.edu n

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Web Site Upkeep

I thought I would take this month to remind everybody that "doing" a Web site doesn't stop with creation. No, Web sites are living, breathing environments that need periodic maintenance. Links to outside Web sites change or are removed, information (like area codes) on your pages change or needs to be updated and occasionally you need to restructure your site based upon user requests.

Verify Hyperlinks

If you are using Microsoft FrontPage, you can use the FrontPage Explorer, Verify Hyperlinks feature to automatically check your links for you. If that's too time consuming or if you don't have access to Microsoft FrontPage there are several free sites that provide checking for you. You can search for them yourself on the Web or go to the [Central Web Support](#) site and follow the HTML Resources link.

Check out either [Dr. HTML](#) or [Net Mechanic](#) for link and HTML verification. Please keep in mind that since these services are wanted by many and are free, they sometimes are blocked because there are too many people on the site.

Why didn't I put anything on the UNT site for local use? Well basically these services provide a lot more expertise than I could hope to give you in any reasonable amount of time. I would love to have set something like this up, and perhaps at some point in the future we will. Unfortunately, even a Webmaster's time is finite and the things to do aren't.

Periodically Re-evaluate and Update Your Site

It's also good to have a periodic review of how your site looks. Perhaps when you first started out you were excited by how easily you could add colors, images and animations to your site. But perhaps you did such a good job with the wild color scheme, nobody can read it. Ask your co-worker's, friends or my office for friendly advice on how to improve your site's look and feel. We are not out to be Web cops and won't suggest you never touch another Web page again (your friends might suggest something like that, but WE won't!). We just want to make the UNT Web site the best university site on the Web.

Also if you have had staff rollover or contact information change in the past 6 months, please keep that updated. Not only for the "world" to know, but for my office's help. We get many questions asked of us. Some of them, we can answer, many we cannot. We try to forward these questions to the relevant department. If we cannot find an E-Mail address or if the message bounces it's a question likely to go unanswered or answered incorrectly because we will try to pass it on to the office most likely to know.

So please put a contact E-Mail address on your pages. Also if you do get mail from an outsider asking for help, please respond. Even if you don't know either forward them to me (at www@unt.edu) or tell the person you don't know. You will be surprised at how effective just replying to E-Mail can be in keeping our clients (whether students, faculty or potential

students) happy can be. There is a company in New England that eclipsed \$1 million in sales last year just over the Internet. This company does not make computer software or have a flashy Web page with the latest buzzword compliant gizmos. They make customized barbecue smokers. When asked for the secret of their success? They replied "We answer our E-Mail."

Don't Forget . . .

Don't forget that [UNT publishing](#) guidelines are on-line. And that we have [a series of images](#) for you to use on your page.

Until next time.

Mark

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Short Courses

By [Claudia Lynch](#), *Benchmarks* Editor

The ACS Short Course schedule is now available for the summer. There are fewer courses offered this summer than there were in the spring, but the types of courses offered remains basically the same. There are courses in SAS, SPSS, Simeon, and Web page creation using FrontPage and Netscape. Additionally, we will be offering a series of courses aimed at people new to UNT -- especially incoming freshmen. "Introduction to Computing Services at UNT," as the courses are called, will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis August 25-September 4. Follow [this link](#) if you would like to find out more about ACS short courses and/or register for some.

The Computer Advantage courses, offered through the Human Resources Department, will resume in July. Because these courses are offered in the Eagle Student Services Center (ESSC) Lab, UNT *students* can also attend the classes. Follow [this link](#) to check on the availability of these courses.

Customized Short Courses

Faculty members can request customized short courses, geared to their class needs. Other groups can request special courses also. Contact ACS for more information (ISB 119, 565-4068, lynch@unt.edu).

Especially for Faculty and Staff Members

As mentioned above, staff and faculty members can also take courses through the [Human Resources](#) Department. A [Distributed Learning Curriculum](#) is also offered especially to faculty members throughout the year. Topics include Windows 95, PowerPoint, Basic Video Conferencing, Multimedia, and a series of classes concerning the World Wide Web.

Alternate Forms of Training

The [Training](#) Web site has all sorts of information about alternate forms of training. Training tapes, Computer Based Training (CBT) and Web-based training are some of the alternatives offered.

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IRC News



Minutes provided by Sue Ellen Richey,
Recording Secretary

IRC Regular Voting Members: Ginny Anderson, Fiscal Affairs; Walter Bowen, Academic Administration; Bill Buntain, Communications Program Group; Carolyn Cunningham, Student Affairs; Paul Dworak, College of Music; Steve Grant, UNT Health Science Center; Don Grose, Libraries; Jenny Jopling, Instruction Program Group; Joneel Harris, Administrative Program Group; Mike Kozak, Faculty Senate; Allen Livingston, Student Association; Steve Miller, Human Resources; Dennis Mueller, Research Program Group; Ramu Muthiah, School of Community Services; Robert Nimocks, Director, Information Technology, UNTHSC; Patrick Pluscht, Distributed Learning Team; Jim Poirot, College of Education; Don Schol, School of Visual Arts; Kathleen Swigger, College of Arts and Sciences; Neal Tate, University Planning Council; Philip Turner, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs for Distance Education and Dean of the School of Library and Information Resources (Chair, IRC); Virginia Wheelless, Chancellor; John Windsor, College of Business. **IRC Ex-officio Nonvoting Members:** Jim Curry, Microcomputer Maintenance Shop; Richard Harris, Computing Center; Coy Hoggard, Computing Center; Maurice Leatherbury, Computing Center; Sue Ellen Richey, Computing Center (Recording Secretary); Rondel Stevens, Telecommunications.

May 19, 1998

Voting Members Present

Philip Turner, Chair, Carolyn Cunningham, Ramu Muthiah, Paul Dworak, Craig Berry (for Don Schol), Don Grose, Kathleen Swigger, Dennis Mueller, Robert Nimocks, Margaret Vestal (for Virginia Wheelless - from 2:00-2:45), Virginia Wheelless, Patrick Pluscht, Dick Vedder (for John Windsor), Walter Bowen, Bill Buntain, Steve Miller, Ginny Anderson, Dallas Newell (for Joneel Harris), Mike Kozak, Allen Livingston.

Non-voting Members Present

Richard Harris, Maurice Leatherbury, Sue Ellen Richey (Recording Secretary)

Members Absent

Jim Poirot, Mike Forster, Coy Hoggard, Jenny Jopling, Neal Tate, Jim Curry

Guests

Tim Christian

DCSMT

Maurice Leatherbury reported for the DCSMT that plans are to roll out the Remedy software package, having it implemented in most distributed computing support areas by the end of this summer. In addition, they continue to look at virus protection software packages.

Maurice commended the new Classroom Support services area, under Jim Curry and Susan Pierce, for the excellent job they are doing.

Maurice also stated that it has been decided that WebCT is the Web course monitoring software that will be purchased for campus-wide use. It is hoped that it will be in place by the end of the summer.

Communications Program Group

Bill Buntain reported for the Communications Program Group that they are still in need of additional members. The committee met on May 1 and looked at DSL technologies that Datacom has been testing. The Housing Department is interested in piloting a project to test one of these technologies. Bill reported that GTE has published presented their plans for deployment in Texas and other states on the World Wide Web in Texas. The Communications Program Group has prepared a survey to find out if current Premium Dial-up Service subscribers are interested in the services GTE is planning to offer. Bill noted that the incremental cost of GTE's xDSL services range over current residential telephone rates in price from \$25.00/month to \$150.00/month and do not include Internet Service Provider (ISP) costs. Bill explained that Data Communications is investigating xDSL technology UNT's plans are to provide access to student dorms without having to re-wire the buildings; as well as to provide remote access for persons in the Denton community.

Administrative Program Group

Ginny Anderson reported for the Administrative Program Group that the committee has seen presentations by EPOS and Brite Systems, and are awaiting proposals from them. The committee is also dealing with an issue related to the Year 2000 problem, which involves some voice response system equipment that is not Y2K compliant and the vendor has no plans to make the equipment compliant.

Maurice Leatherbury stated that the Department of Information Resources (DIR) has mandated that if Year 2000 (Y2K) problems are not fixed by December, 1998 then business continuation plans will have to be written and sent to DIR. Therefore, efforts will be accelerated to resolve as many of the Y2K problems as possible before the end of this calendar year.

Standards & Cooperation Program Group

Paul Dworak reported for the Standards & Cooperation Program Group that they met on May 7 and continue to deal with the Everyone Group E-Mail issue. For the purpose of discussion, they have established three categories of E-Mail:

1. official;
2. calendar; and
3. solicitations, with solicitations being the biggest problem area.

They also discussed the issue of keeping the Everyone Group updated, and will discuss how to do this with the Human Resources department.

Distributed Learning Center

Patrick Pluscht gave a progress report on the Distributed Learning Center, stating that they are gearing up to launch the Center; however, they are still lacking dedicated space for their

personnel. Patrick stressed the importance of keeping a competitive edge in the area of distributed learning. He reported that Jenny Jopling is conducting a faculty training course this week, to assist faculty in developing web-designed courseware.

Biennial Strategic Plan

Maurice Leatherbury announced that DIR has moved the deadline for the Biennial Strategic Plan to June 15, 1998, which is one year earlier than originally set, the reason being to synchronize the State's strategic plan with State Agencies' plans. In view of this upcoming deadline, Maurice drafted a set of goals and objectives and distributed it electronically prior to today's meeting, as a starting point to prepare the final plan that will be sent to the DIR by the June deadline. Maurice asked that Program Group chairs provide their input directly to him. Richard Harris stated that he will call a meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee in the near future.

New Ad Hoc Committee

Mike Kozak presented the idea of developing electronic master templates for both business and academic applications at UNT. There was some discussion with Paul Dworak making a motion that an ad hoc committee be formed to look at the issues involved in electronic master templates. Virginia Wheelless seconded the motion. The motion was tabled, however, and the Chair asked Paul Dworak to draft a charge that might be given to a new ad hoc committee. Paul agreed.

Top 100 Wired Universities

It was announced that the University of North Texas is one of the top 100 wired universities, with one of the criteria being service to students. n

IRC Meeting Schedule

The [IRC](#) generally meets on the third Tuesday of each month, from 2-4 p.m., in the Administration Building Board Room. All meetings of the IRC, its program groups, and other committees, are open to all faculty, staff, and students.n

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Staff Activities

Transitions

The following are new employees:

- **Chin-Hsiang Huang**, ISB 110 Lab Consultant
- **Craig Henderson**, Statistical Consultant (see the article ["Research and Statistical Support Update"](#) to find out more about Craig).
- **Becky Parton**, Programmer - Fiscal Systems
- **Alan Wilson**, Programmer Analyst in Fiscal Systems
- **Kevin Mullet**, Computer Systems Manager in the Datacommunications area of Network and Microcomputer Support
- **Srinivas Konchada**, Datacommunications Assistant
- **Kenneth Harris**, Datacommunications Assistant
- **Shashi Pulakurti**, Datacommunications Assistant
- **Abraham Tei-muno**, Datacommunications Assistant
- **Ravikiran Akkayajhula**, Datacommunications Assistant
- **Venkata Mellacheruvu**, Datacommunications Assistant
- **Balaji Rangaswamy**, Datacommunications Assistant
- **Subramanian Iyer**, Datacommunications Assistant

Employees joining the Computing Center due the Telecommunications merger:

- **Melinda Keylon**, Administrative Asst.
- **Jessica Cornelius**, Campus Info. Operator
- **Tammy Sprabary**, Campus Info. Operator
- **Janice Patterson**, Campus Info. Operator
- **Jennifer Isgitt**, Campus Info. Operator
- **Linda Terry**, Campus Info. Operator Supervisor
- **Bryan Galloway**, Telecom Customer Service Coordinator
- **David Walden**, Telecom Specialist
- **Dowl Morrow**, Telecom Specialist

- **Larry Vick**, Telecom Specialist

Moving on:

- **Ginger Boone**, Network and Microcomputer Systems Computer Support Specialist, transferred to another position on campus.
- **Curry Searle**, Network and Microcomputer Systems Computer Support Specialist, transferred to another position on campus.
- **Jeannie Lee**, part-time Receptionist in Administrative services, transferred to another position on campus.
- **Chui King (Carol) Ng**, resigned from Computer Operations.
- **Chun Bun (Raymond) Yuen**, resigned from Computer Operations.

Awards

- **Jenny Brooks**, Student Services Data Systems, was presented with an award for 10 years of service in May, 1998.
- **Cathy Hardy**, Academic Computing Services, was presented with an award for 10 years of service in May, 1998.
- **Howard Shaw**, Student Records Data Systems, was presented with an award for 10 years of service in June, 1998.n

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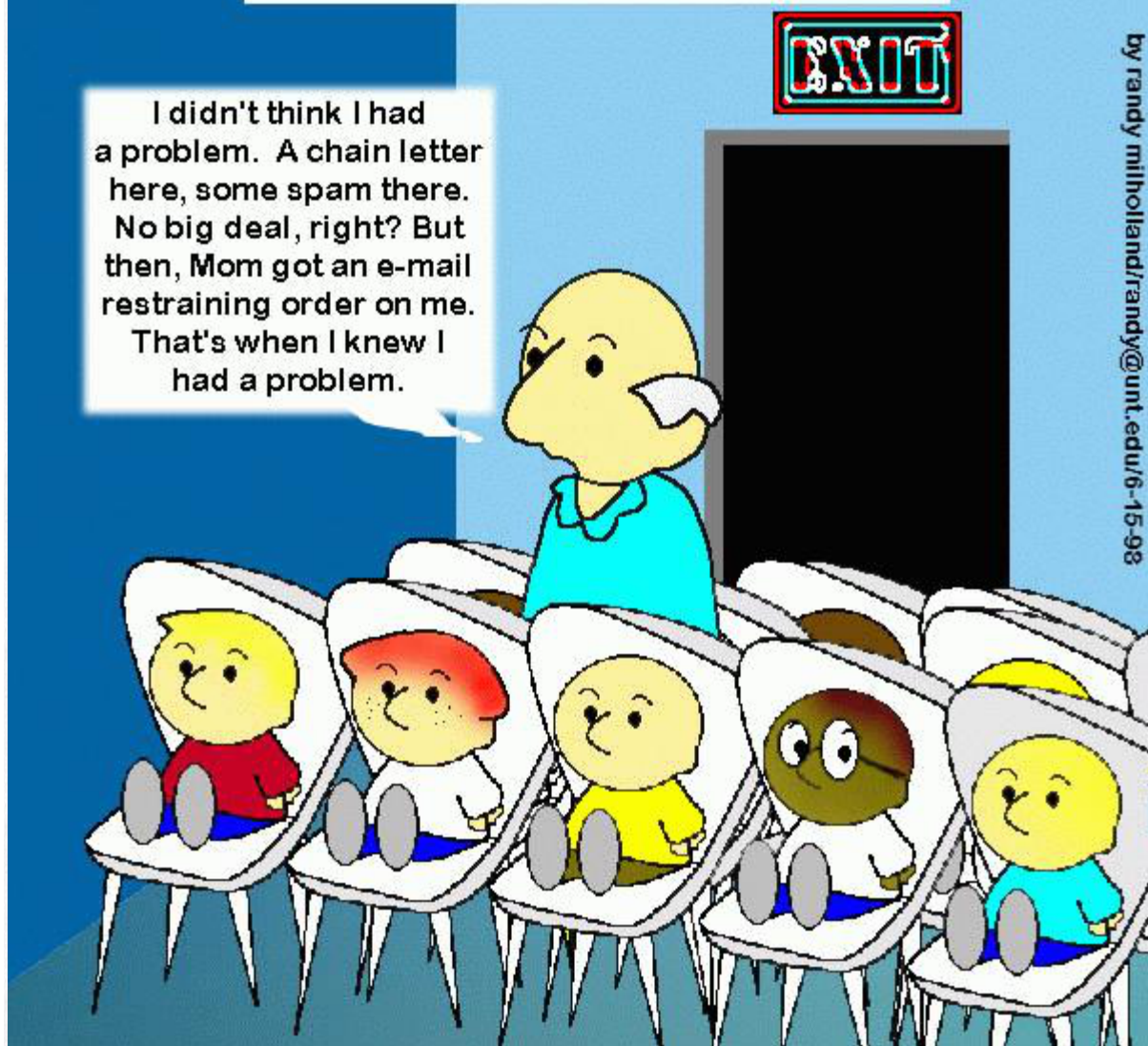
[Shift Key](#)

Shift Key

By [Randal Milholland](#), Documentation Assistant

Stupid E-Mail Anonymous

I didn't think I had
a problem. A chain letter
here, some spam there.
No big deal, right? But
then, Mom got an e-mail
restraining order on me.
That's when I knew I
had a problem.



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If you are looking for back issues of *Benchmarks*, consult the table to the left.

- **Subscribe to the *Benchmarks Online* Mailing List** -- If you would like to know when the latest issue is available and get a preview of it's contents, you can subscribe to the **Benchmarks Online** mailing list, unt-benchmarks. To subscribe to this list just send mail to listserv@unt.edu and in the body of the message put the command:

SUBscribe unt-benchmarks *your name*

For example: SUBscribe unt-benchmarks Jane Doe

To **Unsubscribe**:

1. Send the e-mail to listserv@unt.edu
2. In the body of the message type:

Signoff unt-benchmarks

3. Send.

- **Search *Benchmarks Online*** -- If you are looking for a specific topic you might want to search through the issues. Use the form below to search for documents containing specific words or combinations of words. The text search engine will display a weighted list of matching documents, with better matches shown first. Each list item is a link to a matching document; if the document has a title it will be shown, otherwise only the document's file name is displayed. For more information, see this brief [explanation](#) of the query language, along with examples.

Search for: